Practice guide for primary and secondary schools

Develop techniques and practices

Australian Education Research Organisation

## Classroom management practice

# Setting behaviour expectations for completing learning tasks

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**Effective classroom management creates safe and supportive learning environments for all students. This practice guide is part of a suite of foundational resources for beginning teachers, teachers working in new environments, or experienced teachers who want to refine or refresh specific elements of their classroom management practice. They can be used to individually reflect on and refine one's own practice, or as shared resources to support mentoring and other collaborative and whole-school approaches to improving classroom management.**

**The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)'s guidance is based on a synthesis of the most rigorous and relevant research evidence and guidance on classroom management from a wide range of research experts and expert practitioners across Australia and internationally.**

This practice guide will support you in setting behaviour expectations for your students when completing learning tasks to create a safe, supportive and inclusive learning environment.

Students undertake learning tasks individually, in pairs, in small groups and as a whole class. It's important to set clear behaviour expectations for learning in each of these situations so all students know what's required of them and are better able to take responsibility for their learning behaviours.

Explicitly teach the routine and consider students' backgrounds, experiences, neurodevelopmental profiles and needs to identify and provide adjustments and support. This includes providing visual supports or additional time and prompts as needed.

**Effectively setting behaviour expectations for completing learning tasks requires the following steps:**

1. Gain all students' attention.
2. Clearly communicate the behaviour expectations for the learning task or revisit these with students if already known.
3. Model and practise the behaviour expectations as needed.
4. Start the learning task.
5. Monitor and reinforce the behaviour expectations, providing support when needed.

Effectively setting behaviour expectations for completing learning tasks requires alignment with the whole-school approach, consideration of students' diverse needs and a range of skills, including acknowledgement and praise, circulation, clear communication, deliberately pausing, non-verbal correction, scanning and voice control.

Always interact with students with a calm tone, respect and politeness – for example:

- greeting students on first meeting each day, and using 'Please' and 'Thank you'
- pausing before responding to disengagement or disruption to maintain and model your own emotional regulation, recognising that students' responses may reflect diverse backgrounds, experiences, neurodevelopmental profiles or needs
- positively framing communication, stating what students are being asked to do rather than what they shouldn't do, so that they understand what's required of them. For example, providing the instruction 'Start the task' instead of 'Stop messing about.' This models respectful and polite interactions for students and creates a safe, supportive and inclusive learning environment.

# Effectively setting behaviour expectations for completing learning tasks

## 1. Gain all students' attention

Efficiently gaining all students' attention maximises instructional time and ensures all students – including those needing additional processing time or support – can access instructions and don't miss critical information.

Stand where all students can see you and, with an assertive voice, gain all students' attention:

- using an audible prompt, supported by a visual cue, to indicate to students that they need to stop what they're doing, face you and listen in silence
- pausing and scanning to ensure students are looking and listening
- acknowledging and praising students' safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviours and efforts
- responding to students not giving you their full attention, acknowledging students when they do.

## 2. Clearly communicate the behaviour expectations for the learning task or revisit these with students if already known

It's important that you plan and teach the safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviour expectations for learning tasks so students understand what's required of them. By having the same expectations each time, and providing support as needed, students will become familiar with your expectations and be better able to meet them.

Clearly communicate to all students the behaviour expectations for completing the learning task (or revisit these if already known), indicating the support you're able to provide to students when needed. This will include important instructions for the learning task, such as:

- where students should be
- how they should move around the classroom (if required)
- what they should be doing and how they should be working (individually, pairs, group or whole class)
- how to safely and respectfully interact with each other, including how they should speak to each other and actively listen to and consider others' perspectives
- how long they have to complete the learning task
- what they should do if they need help.

It's also important to communicate why these behaviour expectations are important – ultimately, so all students can focus on their learning in a safe, supportive and inclusive environment.

Examples of different ways of completing learning tasks and how you could communicate expectations include:

- **Independently** – 'For this activity, stay in your own seats, write in your own books and focus quietly so we can all concentrate well. Thank you.'
- **Pairs** – 'In pairs, talk to the person next to you and decide which picture matches each sentence. Use your quiet voice so only your partner can hear you. This will help everyone hear their partners. Thank you.'
- **Group** – 'In your groups, follow the instructions on the sheet. Only one person speaks at a time. Listen when each person speaks so that everyone has a chance to respond and you can consider their perspective. Use a voice loud enough that only your group can hear, so that other groups aren't disturbed.'
- **Whole class** – 'When I say your name, answer the question using a loud enough voice so that the whole class can hear. The rest of us are going to listen to you and think about what you're saying. If you have a question or something to add, please raise your hand so that we can all have our turn and hear each other. Thank you.'

## 3. Model and practise the behaviour expectations as needed

Modelling and providing an opportunity for students to practise the safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviours required for tasks helps them develop the skills to demonstrate them and increases instructional time.

Demonstrate what the behaviour expectations look and sound like, such as using the appropriate volume for different learning tasks, listening and responding to other students, and moving around the classroom safely and quietly.

Check students understand and remember the behaviour expectations – for example, '[Name], can you please remind everyone how we're going to do this activity so that we can all concentrate while we're working.' Correct any misunderstandings.

When students are still learning the expected behaviours, have students briefly practise them – for example, 'Show me what working in pairs looks like and sounds like by discussing your favourite food.' Scan or circulate and acknowledge and praise students' safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviours and efforts to reinforce these. Respond to students not meeting the behaviour expectations with additional support, a non-verbal prompt or quick correction, such as 'Remember, [Name], we're listening to our group members and thinking about what they're saying.' Acknowledge students when they correct their behaviour.

Gain all students' attention and provide feedback on how they went demonstrating the expected behaviour. For example, 'Thank you for demonstrating the expectations for working in pairs. Everyone used partner voices, took turns and listened to and thought about what their partner was saying before they responded.'

Continue to model and practise the safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviours required for completing learning tasks until all students can demonstrate them.

## 4. Start the learning task

Having a distinct start to a learning task provides students with a clear moment for them to demonstrate the expected behaviours. This helps establish a clear sense of purpose and action and prevents disengagement or disruption that may occur during slow, unmonitored transitions.

From a position where all students can see you, deliberately pause and scan, provide a final reminder of the expectations if needed, then prompt students to start the learning task. For example, 'Red group, please stand with your clipboard and pencil. Calmly and quietly move to your work area to begin, being aware of other group members moving too. [Pause.] Blue group, you may calmly and quietly move to your work area to begin. Look out for others as you move.'

## 5. Monitor and reinforce the behaviour expectations, providing support when needed

It's important to monitor all students while they complete learning tasks. This will ensure safety, and reinforce safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviour expectations. It will also demonstrate to students that you care about them, are aware of what's happening in your classroom and will provide adjustments and support when needed.

It's important to monitor all students when they're moving and as soon as they start a learning task to ensure they understand and can do what they've been asked to do. Monitor all students while they're completing the learning task by regularly using a combination of pausing, scanning and circulating. Assist students when needed, ensuring supports and adjustments are provided as required. Acknowledge and praise students' safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviours and efforts. Respond to disengagement and disruption, acknowledging students when they correct their behaviour.

If many students aren't demonstrating the expected behaviours, gain all students' attention and provide a whole-class reminder, modelling and practising as required. For example, 'Three, pens down, two, facing this way, one, everyone listening. [Pause.] Thank you. I can hear some excellent conversations, but we're starting to move into group work noise level rather than partner noise level, making it difficult for others to hear. Please let me hear your partner voices again. [Pause to allow students to practise]. Thank you. Let's continue at that noise level.'

Continue to scan and circulate throughout the learning task. Be mindful of your position when circulating, making sure you can always see all students.

# Rehearse then practise setting behaviour expectations for completing learning tasks

To help with rehearsal and practise, consider the different ways of completing learning tasks:

- individually
- in pairs
- in a group
- with the whole class.

List the behaviour expectations for each of these situations, considering:

- Where should students be?
- How should they move to get there?
- Who should they be working with?
- What should they be doing?
- What materials are required for the task?
- How should they be listening to and considering what others are saying?
- How should they be speaking, including their volume, and how are they to interact with each other?
- How long do they have?
- How should they gain your attention?

Use the checklist for each step in the following section to identify your strengths and prioritise the step you'll focus on first for rehearsal and practice. Focus on one step at a time until you can confidently demonstrate each item on the checklist.

Begin by planning, scripting and rehearsing without students present, then practise with students present.

Invite a colleague to observe you setting behaviour expectations for completing learning tasks. Ask them to use the observation tool to record the observation and provide feedback on what went well and to suggest one area for further improvement.

## 1. Gain all students' attention

Rehearse, then practise:

- [ ] gaining all students' attention by using an audible prompt supported by a visual cue
- [ ] deliberately pausing
- [ ] scanning all students
- [ ] acknowledging and praising students' safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviours and efforts
- [ ] responding to students not giving you their full attention, acknowledging students when they do.

## 2. Clearly communicate the behaviour expectations for the learning task or revisit these with students if already known

Script, rehearse, then practise clearly communicating or revising these expectations:

- [ ] using as few words as possible while maintaining clarity
- [ ] breaking instructions down:
  - into a small number of manageable steps
  - in a sequential order
  - so they're actionable for students
- [ ] deliberately pausing and scanning to check students understand the instructions.

Consider how you might complement verbal instructions with visual supports for students to refer to, especially for multi-step instructions.

## 3. Model and practise the behaviour expectations as needed

Rehearse, then practise:

- [ ] demonstrating what the expected behaviours look and sound like, referring to visual supports where possible
- [ ] checking for understanding
- [ ] correcting misunderstandings
- [ ] providing opportunities for students to practise demonstrating the expected behaviours, prompting students to refer to the visual supports when needed
- [ ] acknowledging and praising students' safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviours and effort
- [ ] assisting students and responding to disengagement and disruption, acknowledging students when they correct their behaviour.

## 4. Start the learning task

Rehearse, then practice prompting students to start learning tasks, keeping instructions simple and brief. Where possible, use the same prompt every time students start a learning task (such as an audible prompt and visual cue).

## 5. Monitor and reinforce the behaviour expectations, providing support when needed

Rehearse, then practise:

- [ ] a strategic position where you can see all students
- [ ] deliberately pausing in your strategic position
- [ ] scanning combined with deliberately pausing
- [ ] circulating the classroom to:
  - support students requiring clarification of an instruction, extra assistance or an adjustment
  - acknowledge and praise students' safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviours and efforts
  - respond to disengagement and disruption, acknowledging students when they correct their behaviour.

Rehearse, then practise gaining all students' attention and re-setting behaviour expectations when needed.

### Questions for reflection

When you've refined and combined each of the steps in this guide, consider:

- What impact is clearly communicating the expectations for completing learning tasks having on students during activities – particularly considering students' diverse backgrounds, experiences, neurodevelopmental profiles and needs? How can you tell?
- What impact does modelling and practising the behaviours required for completing learning tasks have on your students? Can you improve this further to support students in demonstrating the expected behaviours?
- What other skills and practices might you need to refine to help you strengthen how you set behaviour expectations for completing learning tasks?



# Regularly revise setting behaviour expectations for completing learning tasks

Schedule points in the year to revise this practice for yourself and your students.

## For more guidance

The following resources in AERO's classroom management suite provide practical guidance and support related to setting behaviour expectations for completing learning tasks.

### Explainer

- high expectations for student behaviour

### Video

- setting behaviour expectations for completing learning tasks

### Reflection resource

- setting behaviour expectations for completing learning tasks

### Practice guides

- planning for classroom management
- responding to low-level disengaged and disruptive behaviours
- supporting a colleague with refining their practice (and accompanying observation tool)

### Professional learning resources

- facilitation guide
- evidence-based approaches slide deck
- our whole-school approach slide deck
- practical refinement: setting behaviour expectations for completing learning tasks

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